Cal Poly to Confer Three Honorary Doctorate Degrees at Commencement June 15, 16

SAN LUIS OBISPO — Rodeo icon Cotton Rosser, agricultural industry leader James W. Boswell, and engineer-turned-artist Alfred Qoyawayma — all Cal Poly alumni — will receive honorary Doctor of Science degrees at the university’s spring commencement ceremonies Saturday and Sunday, June 15 and 16.

Qoyawayma will deliver the keynote address at Saturday’s event, and Boswell will give the keynote Sunday.

As a student at Cal Poly, Rosser led the university’s rodeo team to the forefront of intercollegiate rodeo competition, launching a winning tradition that would garner 41 national championships. After graduating in 1952, he purchased the Flying U Rodeo Co. and began producing rodeos and making his mark on the industry.

Rosser’s rodeo events are known for their colorful pageantry, innovative showmanship and energetic patriotism. He was instrumental in bringing high school rodeo to California and has been a longtime Cal Poly Rodeo booster and Cal Poly Alumni Association supporter. For his contributions to rodeo culture in the Western U.S., Rosser has been inducted into several rodeo halls of fame and Western museums.

Qoyawayma, whose name is Hopi for “Grey Fox Walking at Dawn,” studied mechanical engineering at Cal Poly. He graduated in 1961 and began his career developing guidance systems for military and commercial applications, including the X-5, the F-15, the 747, and even Air Force One. He then worked for Arizona’s utility industry, leading a team of scientists and engineers in solving challenges to the state’s power and water systems.

He co-founded the American Indian Science and Engineering Society, serving as the first chairman of an organization that has helped more than 12,000 students graduate in the critical STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines. In 1988 he received a White House appointment to become vice chairman of the Institute of American Indian Art, and he became a full-time artist and published researcher on native culture in the Western Hemisphere. He has been a Fulbright Scholar and a featured artist at the Smithsonian’s permanent Archives of American Art, and his “Corn Mother” sculpture is on permanent display at Cal Poly.

Boswell — a 1977 graduate with a bachelor’s in business administration — is chairman and CEO of J.G. Boswell Co., an agriculture and real estate development firm his family founded in 1925. The company owns and operates farms in California and Australia, producing, processing and marketing a variety of crops and developing innovative practices in plant biotechnology and livestock operations. The real estate arm of the company develops planned communities and business parks throughout the Western U.S.

As head of J.G. Boswell, he is also the president of the James G. Boswell Foundation, which supports agricultural education and has helped more than 1,200 graduates. He is a major supporter of Cal Poly’s College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences. Through the foundation, he has established an endowed chair in the Horticulture and Crop Sciences Department, invested in the Agribusiness Management Club, and contributed to the college’s Learn by Doing Fund for Agricultural Education. He has also served on the Cal Poly President’s Cabinet, sharing his real-world insight to help the university continue to educate resourceful leaders in California agriculture.

About 4,000 students are eligible to graduate in Cal Poly’s spring commencement.

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